

CORRESPONDENCE WITH A LAY PREACHER ON THE BIBLE VERSION ISSUE

July 22, 2003 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

On July 17 I received an e-mail from a man in England who identified himself as a lay preacher. He told me that he is looking into the issue of the King James Bible and would like to ask me some questions. He said he has read one of James White's articles in defense of the modern versions as well as my reply to White's book "The King James Only Controversy." (See <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/examining01.htm>) I have decided to print this man's questions and my edited answers for those who are interested:

QUESTION: When you study, say to prepare for preaching as I do, what do you do for clarification of a word from the AV?

REPLY FROM BROTHER CLOUD: For study I use primarily the Strong's concordance, though I use many other tools as well. But more than that I study the context of the word itself. I have found that any Bible word can be interpreted in its own context. In other words, the Bible is wonderfully, amazingly self-interpreting. In fact, a lexicon definition of a word, while helpful, cannot tell you exactly what that word means in any given context. I do not denigrate lexicons and dictionaries, because I have authored one (*The Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*)! But I think you can see what I am trying to explain. My course goes into this extensively.

QUESTION: Do you feel happy looking at a publication such as W E Vine expository dictionary?

REPLY: I have used Vine from time to time through the years. He can be helpful. I know, of course, that he is biased for the critical text, and I simply read him with that in mind. 1 Thess. 5:21.

QUESTION: I use a computer Bible program with the KJV as my main text, but with other versions such as NASB and Young's Literal translation open in order to compare. Do you never do this? (I certainly keep an eye on the NIV translation, because unfortunately some in the congregation use it.)

REPLY: Yes, I have looked at other translations. Of course, I make a vast distinction between a formal equivalency version such as the NASV and a loose dynamic equivalency version such as the NIV. I have no respect whatsoever for the NIV. I understand fully how difficult it is to translate something from one language to another

(being a foreign missionary) and I realize there cannot always be absolute word for word wooden literalness in the sense of an interlinear; but I do not believe translators have the liberty that the NIV crowd has taken with God's Words. I do not widely recommend using even other formal equivalency versions, though, for the simple fact that it can confuse the average person and might mislead them textually. For example, if one is comparing the KJV and the NASV in 1 Tim. 3:16, he will find that the KJV has the word "God" and the NASV doesn't. That, of course, is not a translational issue but a textual one. My course on "How to Study the Bible" gives extensive instructions on how to understand the King James Bible and apply it to one's life and ministry, and in that course I do not recommend using other versions for the simple reason that I do not believe it is necessary. I am merely replying in theory to your question.

QUESTION: What about Italics in the KJV. I note in section 4 of his article, Pastor Cloud gives an excellent analysis of scriptures which undermine the deity of Christ. But towards the end he quotes the 1 John 3:16 which is in italics in the text and which Strong's refers to as a word which was inserted by the translators for better readability. Is it wrong for other translators to leave it out? I cannot see that it undermines Christ's deity when it does not appear to be in the TR.

REPLY: You have a good point as far as it goes, but you need to consider the context in which I used 1 John 3:16 in my analysis of White's book. White makes the claim that the New International Version founded upon the critical Greek text is stronger for the deity of Christ than the KJV, which is based on the Received Greek Text. Since the 1800s, the defenders of the King James Bible have observed that the Received Text is stronger for the deity of Christ, and White attempts to turn this around. In my book "Examining White's 'The King James Only Controversy,'" I demonstrate that he is wrong. For one thing, he cites only part of the record. I give a more thorough survey of the New Testament to demonstrate that when all of the record is examined there is no doubt that the KJV is much stronger in its presentation of the deity of Christ than the NIV. The italics issue aside, 1 John 3:16 in the KJV has a stronger testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ than the reading of the NIV. Both, by the way, add something that is not in the Greek. The KJV adds "God," while the NIV adds "Jesus Christ."

As I am sure you know, the KJV translators (and their 18th century revisers, who expanded the italics) included italics in an attempt to show words that are added in English but that are not explicit in the Greek or Hebrew. We must understand, though, that these were always words that the translators felt were necessary on the English side. The KJV translators did not do anything lightly. That amazing work passed through the hands of each member of each of the six committees. Interestingly, the first English translation, the Wycliffe, has the word "God" in 1 John 3:16. Apparently John Wycliffe and John Purvey (the man who revised Wycliffe's work), as well as the King James translators, believed that the word "God" was implied in this verse and therefore needed to be included in English. On the other hand, the Tyndale and the Geneva do not have the

word “God,” and since it is not directly in the Greek, I would not say that they were wrong in omitting the word. It appears to me that this is one of the many places where there can be justifiable differences of opinion in regard to how a translation should be worded.

QUESTION: How do you feel about the doctrinal approach of the KJV? I know Bible scholars/teachers who I greatly respect and who preach and study from the KJV, BUT one wrote to me some years ago and pointed out that the KJV needs to be watched with regard to things pertaining to the church. The Anglicans (as a denomination, not as individuals) have no understanding with regard to things pertaining to the church. They altered Tyndale’s elders to bishops, congregation to church and love to charity and introduced ideas right through the translation of 'appointment to offices.'

REPLY: I understand that position, but I do not think it is the issue that some make of it. First of all, those instances are not very many. Further, I do not think that the KJV translators did any harm to the Word of God in their choices. The term "church," for example, is not a wrong translation. It was an ancient English word by the time that the KJV translators used it, and beyond that it was an ancient word in Anglo-Saxon (*circ*), Scottish (*kirk*), German (*kirche*), and many other languages. Many linguists believe it was further derived from the Latin “curia,” which in turn was from the Greek “kuriakon,” meaning the Lord’s house (McClintok and Strong’s *Encyclopedia*). Wycliffe used “church,” as did the Geneva. Tyndale, on the other hand, used the term “congregation.” This might be deemed better, but even it is not a complete translation of the Greek word “ecclesia,” meaning “a called out assembly” (derived from two Greek words “ek” and “kaleo,” which mean a calling out). I believe the term "church" in the KJV is easily interpreted by the Bible itself. I have never been tempted to become an Anglican because the KJV has the word "church" instead of "congregation." As for “charity,” that was an excellent translation in my estimation and still carries more of the meaning of the Greek than our modern concept of love. The term “baptism” is another word that some have criticized in the King James Bible. All of the English versions predating the KJV used the word “baptize,” which is simply a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo.” Some Baptists formed a Bible society in the 19th century with the goal of translating “baptizo” as “immerse” instead of transliterating it. They wanted to revise the standard English Bible in this manner, but it never got very far. Even the word “immerse” does not carry the complete meaning of “baptizo,” because it has the meaning of putting something under but not taking up again. Some of the German versions have translated “baptizo” as “dip,” which is a good translation, as it has the complete meaning of immersing something in water and then lifting it out again, which is what scriptural baptism is, being symbolic of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

Again, all of these words must be interpreted by their context in the Scriptures. I do not say that the KJV could never be changed or that its words are always the very best that possibly could be (though I do not believe it can ever be replaced in this apostate end

times). I do believe, though, that in all cases the translators chose a word or phrase that is a proper and allowable translation. I also do not believe that I am scholar enough to correct them! For 30 blessed years since I was saved, they have been my teachers and I have been their humble student. I don't see that changing in this life, because I have only begun to learn what the KJV translators can teach me.

QUESTION: Finally, I have used and been blessed by Martyn Lloyd Jones over the years. He is a great man for defending the truth and as you know he separated himself from much that was evangelical that was compromising. He always used the KJV, but in places would write to clarify. For example, he would say that it is a pity the Authorized Version translators should have used the word 'atonement' here (Rom 5:11), because it is exactly the same word that is translated in verse 10 as 'reconciled.' In your KJV only approach, would you feel this was wrong? If so why? (I am slightly concerned that the KJV is presented as totally infallible.)"

REPLY: I have no doubt that Jones was convinced that he was speaking the truth and was trying to help the Lord's people. I personally would not want to do that, though, for fear of confusing people. I would rather explain that Greek and English words can be used in different ways in different contexts. I would explain that both in verses 10 and 11 in Romans 5, similar Greek words are used (though they are not the same by any means) and that the KJV translators chose to use two entirely different English words. I would explain that the words "atonement" and "reconcile" must be interpreted according to their context and not according to any preset meaning of the words. That is the method that I teach in my course on "How to Study the Bible." The KJV translators' "inconsistent" use of English words has been a matter of debate for all of these centuries. Personally, I am glad that they did not always use the same English word to translate a Greek or Hebrew word, because that is one reason the KJV reads like it does. It has been called the greatest monument to English prose, and that is a powerful statement. One of my favorite methods of word study is to find how a certain Hebrew or Greek word is translated throughout the KJV. It is so wonderfully and endlessly instructive.

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